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Twitter needs Tony (not)

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O'Donnell, Marcus, "Twitter needs Tony (not)" (2013). *Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts - Papers*. 1591.

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Abstract

The Sunday Telegraph has again weighed into the election with a front cover sure to get lots of comment. A little less provocative than The Telegraph's first effort but designed to garner reaction. As I wrote earlier in the campaign, these grand statements, that once represented the newspaper's editorial power to direct votes, now exist in a much more complex world where media users are also media producers. The consistent editorial bias of News Ltd's overall coverage of the campaign will undoubtedly have some effect, although this is notoriously difficult to measure. But reaction to some of its more extreme attempts to sway voters shows that this effect is no longer straightforward and always exists in an extremely reactive media ecosystem. The News Ltd effect may be much the same as the Fox News effect in America. Surveys have shown that Fox News viewers are ill informed on both national and international matters. Viewers who get their news from comedy guru Jon Stewart's Daily Show on the other hand are up there with public radio listeners. But nothing is as simple as it seems. Politifact analysis of various surveys suggest that while Fox News viewers can indeed be spectacularly misinformed they tend to sit close to the national average when it comes to general knowledge. But significantly, during the Bush era, on the crucial issue of Iraq Fox news viewers were more likely to be significantly misinformed in ways that influenced their support for Bush's actions. Many viewers believed for example that there was a direct link between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda. They also dramatically misread the international support for Bush's war believing that the bulk of international public opinion was behind him. I could be wrong, but I'd hazard a guess that News Ltd's tabloid readers would probably be more likely than consumers of other media to believe that economic conditions had worsened under the Rudd/Gillard governments. But in fact, as the Sydney Morning Herald and the Guardian reported yesterday, a new academic study shows Labor "oversaw the smallest increase in cost of living of any Australian government for at least 25 years despite the introduction of the carbon tax". Notably this study didn't get a run in any of the News Ltd tabloids although The Australian did report it. It is this sort of non-reporting that may have a real effect in predisposing voters to opt for Tony's "Real Solutions" because they have been convinced that there is a much bigger problem to solve than actually exists. Like Jon Stewart viewers in America, twitter users here haven't drunk the cool aid, and they are determined to have some fun as they seek to get their message out.

Keywords

needs, tony, not, twitter

Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Law

Publication Details

O'Donnell, M. (2013). Twitter needs Tony (not). *The Conversation*, (01 September)

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